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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003612

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CENTCOM FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: LARGE NUMBERS OF JORDANIANS GO TO THE POLLS;
ANALYSTS EXPECT PRO-MONARCHY MAJORITY AND SMALL BUT VOCAL
ISLAMIST MINORITY TO BE ELECTED TO A NEW PARLIAMENT

Classified By: PolCouns Doug Silliman for reasons 1.5 (B)(D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) According to preliminary estimates, between 50 and 75 percent of Jordanians eligible to vote went to the polls June 17 to elect a new Parliament. Percentages in urban Amman and Irbid seem to be lower. Voting throughout the country was calm, and numerous polling stations had a festive air. Embassy observers report that election officials were uniformly serious and applied election regulations assiduously around the country. Voting fraud seemed virtually nonexistent: EmbOffs observed election and security officials thwart several attempts by voters to cast more than one vote or vote with altered or improper documents.

12. (C) Although preliminary results will not be available until June 18, most analysts expect the new Parliament of 110 seats to have a sizable, pro-monarchy majority. Many observers also expect the Islamic Action Front (IAF) to win 20-25 seats which, if combined with victories by several independent Islamist candidates, will create a small but vocal opposition minority. A senior IAF official told the British Ambassador June 16 that the IAF will not seek cabinet portfolios if a new government is formed. End Summary.

FESTIVE AIR FOR ELECTIONS; LITTLE VOTER FRAUD

13. (C) Jordan conducted its first Parliamentary elections since 1997 on June 17. Embassy officers observed the voting in numerous urban and rural polling stations around the country, including in Amman, Irbid, Jerash, Ajloun, Zarga, Salt, Baqaa refugee camp, Kerak, Tafileh, and Shobak. All officers reported calm and festive polling centers. Security at polling centers was visible, but not intrusive. Election officials in polling places were universally serious about their responsibilities and appeared to apply election regulations assiduously. EmbOffs observed election officials throughout the country checking national ID cards and verifying identities of voters, including those of veiled women (who were asked to show their face to either the polling station manager or a female police officer). EmbOffs reported that the counting of ballots after the close of polls was conducted in the polling centers, with the name from each ballot observed by the electoral committee and read aloud. Representatives of candidates were present at each ballot box observed, and stayed for the counting of ballots. These representatives did not report any problems in polling or vote counting. (EmbOffs in fact observed election and security officials thwart several attempts to cast more than one vote or vote with altered or improper documents. The perpetrators were politely escorted from polling stations, but not taken into custody.)

14. (C) Outside of polling stations, numerous candidate representatives passed out literature and tried to convince undecided voters how to cast their ballots. Many candidates bussed voters to polling stations, but several voters indicated to EmbOffs that they would vote for a candidate other than the one who had provided the ride to the polls. Although prohibited near polling stations, many candidates set up election tents and arranged parades of their supporters to and from polling stations.

GOOD TURNOUT IN RURAL AREAS, TOWNS; LESS IN URBAN AREAS

15. (C) Preliminary numbers compiled from individual polling places around the country indicate a turnout of between 60 and 75 percent in rural areas and small town in the north, center, and south. Outlying Amman suburbs and the Baqaa refugee camp saw an estimated 50-60 percent participation

rate. Voter turnout in urban Amman and Irbid appears to have been lower, with some election officials expressing to EmbOffs disappointment over a less than expected turnout.

PRESS COVERAGE

16. (U) Jordan television (JTV) and radio carried throughout the day live coverage from reporters roving around the country, as well as commentary by Jordanian government officials and analysts. The Ambassador appeared on JTV to support Jordan's democratic process and highlight U.S.-Jordan bilateral relations and U.S. resolve to achieve Middle East peace. JTV will carry live coverage of election results throughout the night as the votes are tabulated.

EXPECTED RESULTS: PRO-KING MAJORITY, ISLAMIST MINORITY

17. (C) While preliminary results will not be available until June 18, most analysts expect the elections to produce a substantial pro-government majority because distribution and weight of districts favor candidates in generally East Bank small towns and rural areas. This majority will likely be tribal, conservative, and pro-monarchy in its orientation. Analysts also expect the IAF to win between 20-25 seats of the 29 they are contesting. (In fact, PolOff witnessed an IAF candidate win the vote count in one Amman polling station.) When coupled with expected victories of several independent Islamist candidates, this should produce a small but vocal opposition minority in the new Parliament. A senior IAF official told the British Ambassador June 16 that the IAF was unlikely to seek any cabinet portfolios if a new government is formed after elections.

18. (C) Although analysts pinpointed 3-4 contests in which women candidates ran close races, most did not expect more than 1-2 women to win seats outright (many expect women to get only the six newly created women's seats).

19. (C) Embassy will report on the results of the elections as they become available June 18.
GNEHM